**MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL**

**THE HON MATT KEOGH MP**

Minister for VETERANS’ AFFAIRS

MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL

**SKY NEWS NEWSDAY**

**THURSDAY 11 AUGUST 2022**

**SUBJECTS: *ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE AND VETERAN SUICIDE INTERIM REPORT***

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** The Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicides has tabled an interim report with its final findings due in mid at 2024. Joining us live is the Veterans Affairs Minister Matt Keogh. Minister, really appreciate your time. Thank you. You apologised to veterans after reading this report, on behalf of the government today. What is it specifically that you're apologising for? Is it the way they were treated while they were serving in the ADF, afterwards the bundled claim system? All of the above?

**MATT KEOGH:** Well it's clear we've seen in the evidence that was given to the Royal Commission and the way it's described it in the report that it's provided today. An interim report that people's experience, some people's experience in defence, some people's experience in trying to get support from the Department of Veterans Affairs has not met the mark, it has not met the expectation and I'm very sorry for that. But what we're committed to now is we've welcomed the interim report. We've seen the recommendations just today and we will provide a formal response to those recommendations shortly so that we can get on with the job of improving the lives of our serving personnel, veterans and their families.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** There has been a real focus on the need to improve the claims system. Have you made any inroads in terms of clearing the backlog and can you commit to a timeline of when that backlog will be cleared? Is it realistic to hope that it will happen sometime next year?

**MATT KEOGH:** Well, we recognised that there was a problem with this claims processing in opposition. It's why we committed to an additional 500 staff at the Department of Veterans Affairs to get through this claims backlog. We've commenced that process now and I'm working closely with the department to model exactly how long it's going to take to get through this backlog, to make sure we can get through it as quickly as possible. There are an increasing number of claims being made, not just by veterans, but by people who are currently serving in the Defence Force and we want to make sure that their claims are processed as quickly as possible. But it is also important to point out that for people that are in the Defence Force, they obviously have access to all of the support and health services that they received there and for veterans, they can get immediate payments. They can also get medical assistance with the most claimed types of conditions we see coming out of Defence, even before their claims have been fully processed. So they do get access to the immediate support they need, but we do need to process these claims quicker and it's why we made that commitment in the election.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** You described reading this report as confronting reading. Unfortunately, we've seen a lot of confronting issues raised in previous inquiries looking at this exact issue. How can you give confidence to the families and the veteran community that this time will be different, that you will actually follow through on these recommendations and that we will see the lives of veterans better supported as a result of this Royal Commission?

**MATT KEOGH:** And I completely understand those concerns from veterans and families. We've seen report after report, made very similar recommendations and the previous government didn't get on with implementing those. That's partly why we joined with the families of defence personnel and veterans that have taken their lives in calling for this Royal Commission in the first place. Because we knew we really needed to have the concrete sort of recommendations that we've gotten out of this interim report and no doubt we'll get out of the final report in a couple of years time. So that as a government we've got a prioritised list of things that we need to get on with and I look forward to getting on with this task of implementing these recommendations. We'll be providing a formal response with how we'll be able to do that shortly. And obviously, this is going to be a key priority for my work and the work of the government.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Matt Keogh, the Veterans Affairs Minister joining us live in Canberra. I appreciate your time. Thank you.

**MATT KEOGH:** Thanks, Ash.

**END**

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Stephanie Mathews (Minister Keogh’s Office): 0407 034 485

DVA Media: media.team@dva.gov.au

*Authorised by The Hon Matt Keogh MP.*

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